

Use Your Head

The fourth item in the first part of the ten-week Communist University “Education” course is our own “conspectus” (overview or synopsis) of Tony Buzan’s book, “Use Your Head” (attached; download linked below).

We have sometimes in the past been defensive about the inclusion of this book in a Communist course. The author Buzan does not propose, or proceed from, any overt political premises. If anything he appears at first sight to resemble a utilitarian bourgeois “management guru” or “motivational speaker”. What makes his work stand out, at first, from others

of that kind, is its great practical effectiveness, and not any obvious political aspect.

Yet, after all the years of forcing Buzan's work to cohabit with Marxist texts, it becomes clearer to this VC why it fits in so well: It is dialectical! And it is intentional! Therefore it is Freirean, whether consciously or unconsciously so.

From a practical point of view, Buzan's appeal is that he offers assistance with faster, more purposeful reading; with memorising; and with note-taking, particularly using his invention, the "mind-map" technique, of which an example is given above.

These techniques are just what students need to help them get through their studies – and just what conventional education often failed to give them.

Students used to be obliged to try to learn, before having learned *how* to learn. Buzan filled this gap very well.

But what underlies Buzan's approach? It is not that he was lucky to stumble upon three techniques, like a prospector discovering diamonds. No. What distinguishes the mind-map, in particular, from other forms of note-taking characterised by lists and bullet-points, is that it begins and ends as a "unity and struggle of opposites". It is a representation, in one glance, of the way in which any phenomenon is the product, or resultant, of many abstract dynamic forces, or vectors, pulling in different directions.

The mind-map is a very good illustration of exactly what is meant by “dialectics”.

The other main characteristic of Buzan’s approach is its “intentionality”, to borrow a term from Paulo Freire’s vocabulary. Towards the end of Chapter 1 of Freire’s “The Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, Freire quotes Alvaro Vieira Pinto saying that intentionality is *“the fundamental property of consciousness”*, remarking that this concept is *“of great importance for the understanding of a problem-posing pedagogy”*.

Buzan’s approach is full of intentionality. There is no question, for Buzan, of wandering about, learning for learning’s sake, in a random, eclectic way. Buzan says that you must be looking for a result.

Karl Marx, in the 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, said that while the philosophers have interpreted it, the point is to change the world.

Thus intentionality, as well as dialectics and dialogue, are common and basic themes in Freire, Buzan and Marx.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: Tony Buzan, [Use Your Head, 1974, Conspectus by D Tweedie](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).